585 When we arrived in procession at the bride's house, we found all her relatives gathered in the drawing-room, men down one side and women down the other; at the head a couch for the presiding elders, U Maung Maung and Mr. Swithinbank, before it a pair of rich cushions for the bridal pair to sit upon, and before it again a giant bowl of carved silver, filled with flowers and offerings. Everything in here was silent, restrained and correct. None but relatives were present, not divorcees, nor those whose married lives had been scandalous, lest they spoil the auspicious nature of the day.

585 292 832 I slipped into the bedroom to see the bride and, pausing, caught my breath to see how lovely she looked at that moment. On her wedding-day a Burmese woman wears the full court-dress of the by-gone days of the Burmese kings; the dress was worn by the queens and princesses of our songs and history, as they bowed before the magnificence of the king on his throne, as they stood by casements in the moonlight, as they sang songs of melancholy when evil days were upon them and their enemies had prevailed over them. The long side tress, the trailing open skirt, the tight jacket which left the bosom bare for necklaces of diamonds, were created to show the perfections of a beautiful woman. Neither tall nor short should she be, her waist small and her breast carried high, her skin smooth and yellow like the thanakha finely ground, rich and creamy, her eyes like those of a golden doe, beneath eyebrows arched no heavier than a three days' moon, her lips two ruby gems, and her hair as black as a beetle's wings. Such was Ommadhanti, such Pabhawadi, the beautiful one. Such was my sister-in-law on that day as she came out, betraying no emotion and recognizing no one as she walked up the room in silence and sank down on the cushion beside the bridegroom.

585 Now the writer of the panegyric rose and chanted the paean of praise. The young *tha-do-tha*, Maung Sett Kaing, so blessed with virtues, complete with every manly quality; the young *tha-do-thami*, Khin Khin Su, so beautiful and full of womanly dignity; both of good race, good stock, to be married thus auspiciously, to have a good long life together, so great is their merit. Then the elder presiding lady put the offerings from the silver bowl, one after another, into the hands of the bride, and she made obeisance with each one. Now was every evil banished and every good present, for the performance of the *mingala*, the auspicious thing. The bridal pair rose from the cushions and took their places on the couch; U Maung Maung took the hands of bride and groom, laid them one upon the other, and dipped them into a golden bowl of water as the reader of the panegyric now called witness to the marriage. Then Mr. Swithinbank held their hands together and said

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S B 305 751 563 they mutter spells and incomprehensible incantations over the "medicine," are looked up to with profound belief and a very considerable deal of awe.

B 304 531 The tattooing on the loins and legs is universal with all Burmans, and nothing more is ordinarily required; but there are very few who have not charms of some kind tattooed on the arms, back, chest, or even on the top of the head, which is shaved for the purpose. These figures are of all kinds—lizards, birds, mystic words and squares, rings, images of the Buddha, and sometimes merely a few scattered dots, the latter especially on the face, between the eyes, over the ears, or on the chin. The colouring matter is almost always vermilion, with drugs and solutions, according to requirement, mingled with it. The blue dye from the lampblack never disappears, but the red colour of the vermilion gradually fades away and vanishes. Nevertheless figures of this kind, more or less distinct, are to be found on Burmans of all ages, so great is the national superstition. Even the town youths, whose limbs are smooth and "unbreeched" as a girl's, are never without some charms of this kind, if it is only the a-nu se, which enables a man to gain the woman he loves. This "drug of tenderness" is composed of vermilion mixed with a variety of herbs and curious things, prominent among which is the bruised, dry skin of the tauktè, the trout-spotted gekko, whose sonorous cry and fidelity to the house where he establishes himself and brings luck, are well known to all who have visited Burma or Siam. It is very sparingly used, a few round spots arranged in the shape of a triangle being of sufficient virtue to ensure the object aimed at. The commonest place for them is between the eyes, but occasionally the se sayā recommends the lips, or even the tongue, and his advice is always followed. This is the only tattooing which women ever have executed on them, and there are not many of them who have it done. The patient is usually a love-sick maiden who is afraid the object of her affection will escape from her, or a girl whom rolling years warn that she must be quick if she would not be condemned to remain an a-pyo heing, an old maid. Except in very desperate cases, however, they always manage to persuade the operator to place the charm on some part of the

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body where it will not be visible. If it is not effectual, there is always open to them the signal afforded by kindly national custom to maidens longing for a mate. They cut off the lappets of hair, the bya-bazan, hanging over the ears, and the significance is the same as the white heather of the language of flowers, "heart for sale." In Rangoon the tattooing of a woman has a special signification, not recognised elsewhere. It means that she wants an Englishman for a husband. Poor thing!

Another very universal kind of tattooing is that with a-hpi se. Almost every schoolboy in the country has a specimen of this on him, for does it not prevent him from feeling the pain when he is caned? No amount of falsified hopes in the experience of friends will persuade him that it may not be effectual in his case, and a flogging is often courted as an immediate test of its efficacy. Pride repels the inquiries of chums as to the results, but the experimenter is usually very well behaved for some time. In the case of older men the a-hpi se acts as a talisman against bullets, sword cuts, and ills of that kind. Allied to this are the thenat hpi, which soldiers and dacoits carry about with them. These are the horns of buffaloes and other animals, which may be plain, but are usually elaborately carved with figures according to fancy. They must be quite solid down to the root. A hollow or flaw of any kind deprives them of their virtue. While the man has such a talisman in his hands he cannot be killed. A monkey is a very favourite image to have carved in this way on a sword or dagger hilt, the reference being to the tale of the Ramayana. Of a similar nature are talismans which are especially used by soldiers and dacoits. These hkaung-beit-set are charmed or consecrated objects let into the flesh under the skin. They are of various kinds. Some are gold, silver, or lead; others curious pebbles, pieces of tortoise-shell, or bits of horn, all of them with incantations of mystic character written on them. Many famed dacoits have long rows and curves of them over the chest, showing in little knobs through the skin. When they get into English prisons, an energetic jailer has been known to cut them out, lest they should be pieces of gold or silver, or perhaps precious stones, with which the turnkeys

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CHAPTER IV

EAR-BORING

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THE first great event in a Burmese girl's life is the nā-twin mingala, the boring of her ears. She is not out of the doll stage till that happens. She may have toddled after her mother to the market with a basket of fruit on her head, long before the ear-boring, but that ceremony is as much an epoch to her as putting on the yellow robe, or getting his legs tattooed, is to her brother. Ever afterwards she will look upon every male as a possible lover. No more taking alternate whiffs at a big green cheroot with little Maung Po; no more teasing Po Shan to let her have a taste of those fine nettè mangoes his father has got down from Mandalay; no more dawdling about the streets by herself, watching the small boys playing with the round gôn nyin seeds, or having a hurried glimpse of the puppet play, while she is supposed to be at home looking after the house with her little brother. When she walks out now it will be with her mother, or an aunt, or married sister, as a chaperone; and if she goes to the play it will be in formal procession, and with all her finest clothes on. Nothing like getting the ears bored to set a girl thinking about the wave of the hair that falls down in lappets by her ears, or the best recipe for the fragrant straw-coloured thanaka, with which she tints her face and charms half the senses of the gallants. It even alters her walk. She sets about practising the coquettish sway of the body in walking, which is considered so attractive, and which a philosophical matter-of-fact Darwinian would probably declare was first of all due to an involuntary throwing out of the heel with each step to keep the folds of the dress

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modestly closed in front, and to prevent the dainty slipper, just covering her toes and no more, from slipping off the foot. However that may be, it is an accomplishment indispensable to a Burmese belle. She takes as much pains over it as she does with her jetty tresses. In a word, the nā-twin mingala transforms the girl into a woman, just as much as admission to a monastery makes the boy a man. It is her baptism, and is the distinctive mark of her race. Most of the men get their ears bored too, but the ceremony is not so solemn with them, and latterly is not so universal, at any rate not in the towns on the coast.

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The ceremony takes place at the age of twelve or thirteen, just when the girl has attained puberty in fact. Her sadā is submitted to a soothsayer, that a fortunate day and hour may be chosen, and that being fixed, a great feast is prepared, and all the friends of the family and the relations are invited. An invitation to an ear-boring feast is a very urgent matter. No one can refuse without a very good excuse, and serious business is often postponed to the demands of such a ceremony. Everybody comes early, and sits down in any place he can find round about the front part and sides of the room, the girl, with all her female relatives about her, reclining on a mat at the back. The bedin sayā stalks about gazing at a mysterious strip of palm-leaf, or apparently wrapped in deep thought. Beside him is the professional ear-borer. He carries the needles, which are almost always pure gold, and even in the case of the poorest, never of any baser metal than silver. Rich people very often have them set at the ends with precious stones. At last the soothsayer gives the sign that the favourable moment has arrived. The ear-borer moves up immediately and passes the needles through the lobe of the ear, sometimes using a cork as they do in England, but more often letting them pass between two of his fingers. The girl, who has been worked up into a high state of excitement and terror by all the preparations, usually struggles and shrieks as hard as she can, but the women round about hold her down, and the band of music in the street outside strikes up a rapid movement and drowns her lamentations, while all the visitors burst into a flood of talk

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545 Zawtagômma melodrama, which the old sayā at Pegu has just brought out, and which is having a tremendous run all through the low country. The song is about the Saddan mere, the lake of the Lord White Elephant, where golden lotuses flower perpetually, where the gorgeous yin-dwin bird sails on the silvery waters, great butterflies flap about with painted wings and sip the nectar of the fabled jasmine, and peacocks stalk proudly on the jewelled margin, while around
522 roam elephants white, red, and black in happy security. The singer has hardly finished when the lu-byet, the village jester, breaks in with a travesty of the whole thing, mocking at the tremolos and the lofty style, and taking off the peculiarities of the singer. He went out to a lake too, and launched a canoe on it, but he was capsized by a huge creature that came up from below; and then he found that he had got into a slimy buffalo wallow, out of which he only escaped after great peril from the horns of its three outraged owners, who butted him under the surface many times; and at last, when he crawled out, he was so brown and dirty that some passers-by took him for a hermit, and gave him some rotten
522 plantains in alms. Before the "prince" has time to show
593 any bad temper, a girl commences a coquettish ditty, somewhat after the fashion of the English "Paddle my own canoe," about a poor wife whose husband comes home and storms and growls and abuses because there is no rice ready cooked, softens down when he has crammed himself with curry and rice, but breaks out into grumbling again at night because his wife cries and will not go to sleep. Such tyranny the young lady declares she will never expose herself to, or
533 at any rate "she'll be no submissive wife." Then there are a
832 few love-songs, wherein the girls are compared with the maids of the palace in Mandalay, and the Mandalay girls generally (who are *ex officio* pretty) with the daughters of nats, with Madi, the model wife of Wethandaya (the prince who in his next existence became the Lord Buddha), with flowers and stars and gems, and whatever similes lovers all the world over are in the habit of making. The swaying of the body as they walk, the turning in of the elbows, the fragrant powder on their cheeks and necks, and a few other items which would not commend themselves to a Western admirer,

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are recorded with enthusiasm and delighted precision of detail; and when an hour or so has been passed in this way, a little more rice-husking is done, and the girls set to work getting ready the onions and sesamum seed, and slicing up the cocoa-nut kernels. This sort of thing goes on all the night through. There is half an hour's work, and then an hour of singing and story-telling and gossip; about the great Shinbinthalyaung, the gigantic recumbent image of Shin Gautama dug up lately near Pegu; of the two min-laungs, the embryo kings, who have been revealed there, and the third one, who is foretold by the old theit-sa, the prophecy which declares that he will restore the ancient Talaing kings and revive religion; of the new hti which is being set up on the pagoda of the lotus tank, and its exceeding splendour, each single one of the concentric rings having been assigned as a particular favour to one out of many competing districts. Then there is a discussion as to the new fashion of turbans, the one plain colour with worked flowers on it, which has supplemented the old thinner style with more braid-like patterns; and the present rage for waist-cloths with many-coloured stripes in place of the old wavy and dog's-tooth fashion. Then the girls are rallied about the method in which they dress their hair—all of them in the style just declared treasonable in the upper country. Queen Supayalat has hit upon some particular set, or plaiting of her tresses, which she thinks becomes her very well, and a royal order has come out making it penal for any meaner damsels to adopt the same method. Consequently all the maidens from Taungoo to Kyauk-Hpyu and the A-eng Pass to Malawun have made up after the queenly model and flatter themselves that it is *chic*. There are always ghost stories at these gatherings, tales about the three farmer brothers that were killed just after harvest time three years ago, and now haunt the dense patch of swampy jungle down by the creek as nat seins, and sometimes scare the fishermen out of a night's work by the violent agitation of the tree-tops on a still night; and then there is that old hag in the lone house at the far end of the village, who is certainly a witch; it must have been she who gave the old sikkè the tet, poor old man, and he a payā-tagā too, founder

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O that curve in the round arm!
It has wrought men grievous harm.
Like the sylphs when they're at play,
Like the maids of Mandalay,
Without display
In everyday
Quiet dresses they
Are busked and gay
As the daughters of the palace, as the maidens of the skies
In their natural, their usual array.

O! could I but sing what I think,
My heart would no more on the brink
Of despairing love struggle and sink,
Ye maidens to heavens the link;
Each passer-by
Who casts his eye
Upon the buxom Hanthawaddy girls,
Though he be sage,
His feelings wage
Fierce war within his brain-pan till it whirls.

Dewa daughters, fair, fair,
Rosebud fairies, ware, ware,
Born men's hearts to snare, snare,
Can I paint your ways,
Better sound your praise,
In verse
That's terse
Than thus: You're fair as any maid in Mandalay.

Barani is a daughter of nats, corresponding very much to the classical Flora. [832]

Madi, the spouse of Prince Wethandaya, is always regarded as the model wife. [593]

Amè! "mother!" is the invariable exclamation of all Burmans on all possible occasions of astonishment, anger, doubt, or delight. [201]

The name Hanthawaddy, properly applied to the whole province, is, in songs, usually employed to designate Rangoon, for rhythmical more than any other reason, just as Mamye, or Mye, or Man stands for Mandalay. [195]

"Rosebud fairies," called bôngyo, are daughters of nats, who having stayed in the country of the dêwas for a thousand years, are obliged to come down to the seat of man again. 539 773